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The Egyptian Jars from Sidon in Their Egyptian Context[1]

A Preliminary Report

Introduction

The recently started excavations at Sidon by the British Museum under the direction of Claude Doumet-Serhal are revealing important clues not only for the chronological framework of the Lebanon itself but also in placing Sidon in the wider chronological network, which is emerging in the entire Eastern Mediterranean. The internal chronology of the excavation at Sidon is based mostly on the ceramic finds and their stratigraphy and starts from the Chalcolithic or Early Bronze Age I, onwards[2].

For our purposes the Middle Bronze Age is of special interest. Above the Early Bronze Age levels, mentioned above, a sterile sand layer varying in depth from 0,9 m to 1,4 m was found. Dug into this layer of sand were a number of different types of burials dating to the Middle Bronze Age I/IIA and later[3].

The Egyptian Jars

Two of the tombs mentioned above, burials number 13 and 24 respectively, each contained one Egyptian ceramic vessel. Ceramic samples from these jars were identified by the author [4] as Egyptian Marl C[5] by means of a low magnification microscope at 20 x magnification thus confirming the preliminary impression suggested by the typical shape of one of the jars (from burial 24). These two vessels provide an additional, if preliminary link for the relative chronologies of Sidon and Egypt not via the typical Middle Bronze Age ceramic corpus that is found in Egypt almost exclusively at Tell el-Dabᶜa, but via Egyptian style vessels found in the Levant.

Burial 13, found in the 2001 season, cuts into the sand layer above the Early Bronze Age levels. It contained the flexed skeleton of an infant oriented east to west with the face towards the north. The actual tomb was built by means of clay. Among the finds were a silver anklet, a spearhead, gold leaf and the jar [6] that turned out to be Egyptian. This vessel does not resemble the local ceramic repertoire of the site[7]. In the internal chronology of the site this grave belongs to phase 1, which is currently assessed as Middle Bronze Age IIA.

The Marl C-jar from Burial 13 is handmade,[8] globular in shape (maximum diameter of the vessel lies approximately in the middle of the pot) and has a very bulging neck that leads to a direct rim. It has to be stressed here that this feature can not

1 I would like to thank Claude Doumet-Serhal most cordially for inviting me to write this article and for a most inspiring discussion in London, together with D. Griffiths and D. Aston. My heartfelt thanks go to D. Aston for correcting the English of this paper.

2 Overview of finds in C. Doumet-Serhal 2003 a, 2-6.

3 Cf. C. Doumet-Serhal 2001, 162 – 171. C. Doumet-Serhal 2003 b, 7 – 16.

4 Also identified by D. Aston. Perhaps it should be mentioned here, that the visual identification of Egyptian clays is mainly achieved by looking at sherd breaks rather than at thin sections.

5 H. Å. Nordström, J. Bourriau 1993, 168 – 182, esp. 179 – 180. B. Bader, 2001, 19 – 41, Colour pl. I – V. B. Bader 2002, 29 - 54. The interesting idea of Marl C as being a texture or a "recipe" that could be transferred elsewhere outside of Egypt as coined by Dafydd Griffiths is certainly worth consideration. Perhaps further testing can prove or disprove this theory. At the moment there is no evidence on which such considerations could be based. However, what is clear is that among the subgroups of Marl C considerable variation exists and that the clay source is not yet known, although archaeological facts point to the Egyptian Memphis-Fayoum region as place of origin (see fig. 3).

6 C. Doumet-Serhal 2001, 164 – 165.

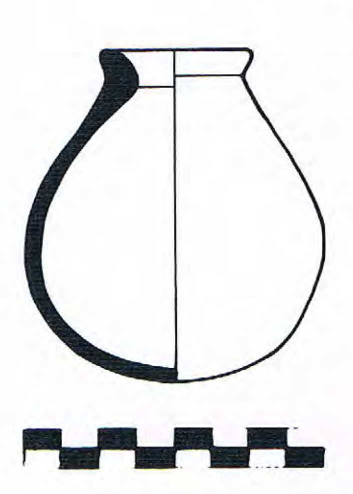
7 C. Doumet-Serhal, personal communication.

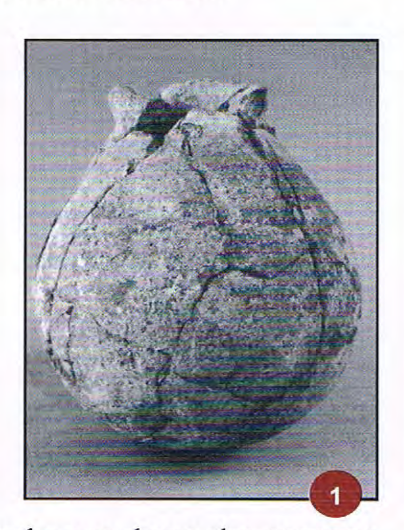
8 C. Doumet-Serhal, personal communication.

be exactly paralleled amongst Egyptian material. It should be borne in mind, however, that not all existing variants of vessel types have yet been found and that there are still new forms being discovered, which were unattested before.

The overall height of the vessel from Sidon is 9 cm, the rim diameter is 4 cm, maximum width ca. 8. 5 cm.

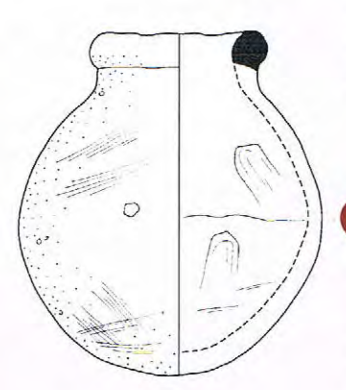
1 Jar S/1826 from burial 13 at Sidon.





Small[9] jars similar to the one above also occur on several Egyptian sites in the Middle Kingdom and the Second Intermediate period[10]. They can be divided into two basic groups, namely a group with round bases, that is of special interest here, and a group[11] with flat bases.The best comparable Egyptian counterparts to the Sidon vessel from Burial 13 indicate a date range from the early to late 12th Dynasty, provided there is no overly long time gap between the production of the vessel and its deposition in the burial at Sidon[12].

At Tell el-Dabᶜa small, globular jars made of Marl C were found in the area of ᶜEzbet Rushdi (fig. 2)[13]. Their overall shape is very similar, although the neck of the Sidon jar is more restricted and bulging on the inside of the neck. The levels, in which they were found, date from the earlier part of the 12th dynasty to the late 12th Dynasty[14].



2 Small, globular jar, Tell el Dabᶜa, after Bader, 2001, scale 1:3.

Because such jars are missing from the ceramic repertoire of the early Middle Kingdom settlement of Tell el-Dabᶜa, F/I, stratum "relative e"[15], yet occur in the pyramid complex of Sesostris I at Lisht, about 160 km south of Tell el-Dabᶜa, it seems safe to assume that this type first appears around the reign of Sesostris I and continues throughout the 12th dynasty[16]. The mid-part of the 12th Dynasty is scarcely known in terms of its ceramic repertoire, and it is hoped that the publication of ᶜEzbet Rushdi will fill this gap at least for the North of Egypt.

9 A small sized vessel is determined by a height up to 15 cm. Cf. Do. Arnold 1988, 135 – 136.

10 It has to be noted that the Second Intermediate Period in Egypt in terms of ceramic development is also problematic, because of a certain regionalism in the ceramic styles. Cf. J. Bourriau 1997, 159 - 182. A. Seiler 2003, 49 – 72.

11 B. Bader 2001, Type 62, 64 and 65, 199 – 204.

12 Included in this article are only the securely dateable comparanda. For covering entire Egypt and old excavations see B. Bader 2001, 199 – 200.

13 B. Bader 2001, Abb. 22 m, Cat.nr. 158. E. Czerny 2002, 138, fig. 25 b.

14 Czerny 2002, 133, ca. Amenemhat II. Note that for this material a date to the reign of Sesostris I. has been suggested by Do. Arnold at a conference about Fine-dating Middle Kingdom pottery held at Cairo, 2002.

15 Cf. E. Czerny 1999, *passim*. Only rim fragments.

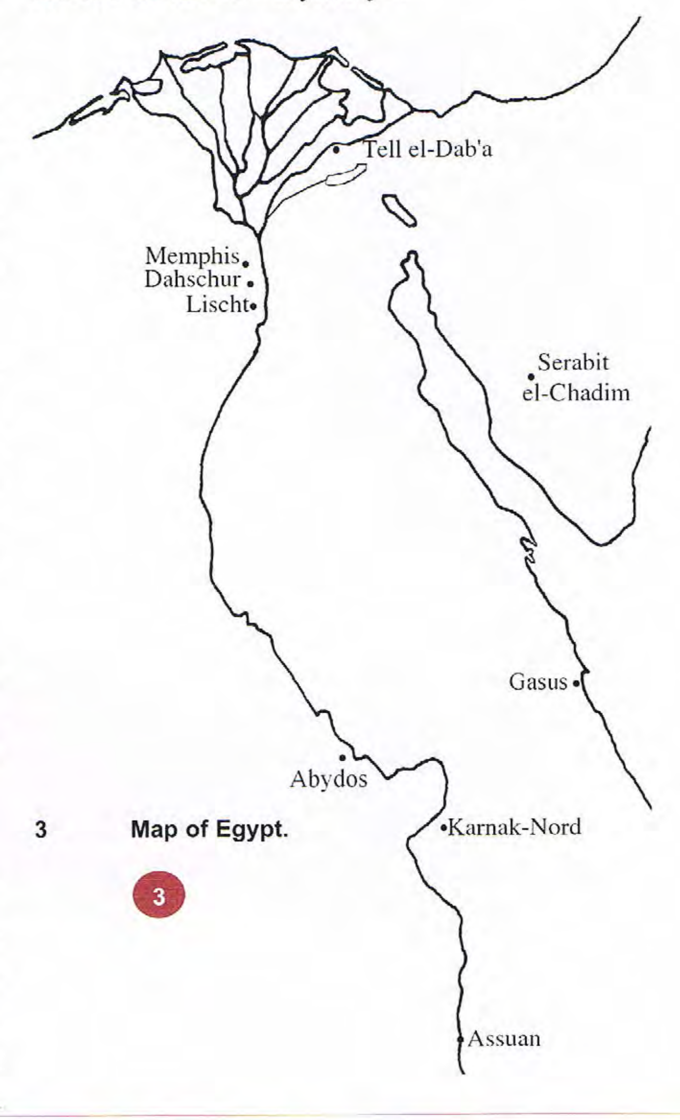
16 Cf. Do. Arnold 1988, 199, 120, 143, 134, fig. 74. 84/183, 84/184.

Small jars made from Marl C fabric are frequently defined as model vessels, because of their size and because of their deposition in tombs and offering deposits. However, it should be borne in mind that not every small container must be regarded as a model – this function is defined by the find context of the vessel. Small jars are also known from settlements[17] and it can be assumed that they served as containers for contents of a more precious character such as special cosmetic oils or fats.

As pointed out above this group seems to appear around the later reign of Sesostris I and continues throughout the 12th dynasty as seen at ᶜEzbet Rushdi. From the late 12th/ beginning of 13th dynasty onwards to the end of the 13th dynasty some more variants of small jars exist contemporaneously without an apparent chronological pattern[18].

These variants comprise globular and bag-shaped body forms as well as round and flat bases. Overall they look different to the vessel from Sidon.

The geographically farther removed parallels found at Elephantine/Assuan (see fig. 3) in the very south of Egypt suggest an equally long span of occurrence for small, globular vessels. One vessel made of Marl C is known from Bauschicht 14 – 15. It is handmade, of globular shape, but shows a different variant of rim[19]. This level was dated to the 11th – 12th Dynasties by the excavator[20] and fits roughly with the above considerations. Another similar but later example comes from Bauschicht 13[21] and has currently been re-dated to the end of the 13th Dynasty[22].



3 **Map of Egypt.**

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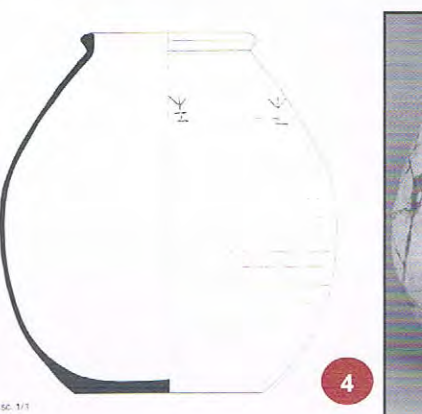
17 For example from Kom Rabiᶜa/Memphis and ᶜEzbet Rushdi, B. Bader 2001, 204, cat. nr. 368; 200, cat. nr. 349 as well as from Elephantine cf. C. v. Pilgrim 1996, fig. 155.c and 161.j.
18 Cf. B. Bader 2001, 199 – 204.
19 C. v. Pilgrim 1996, Abb. 161 j. Height 12.2 cm, rim diameter = 6.6 cm, max. diameter = 11.4 cm.
20 C. v. Pilgrim 1996, 15, 72 – 75.
21 C. v. Pilgrim 1996, Abb. 155.c. Dated to the end of Amenemhat III by the excavator, *Idem,* 15. T. Rzeuska 1999, 195 – 204, works with a late 12th/early 13th Dynasty date.
22 A. Seiler 2003, 24, 63.

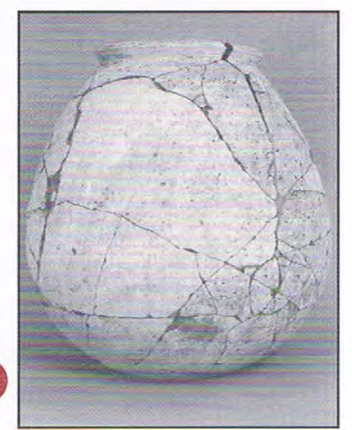
However, the regionalism of the Second Intermediate Period as well as the southern position may be the reason for the longer occurrence of the small globular type that resembles the Sidon vessel. Only the final publication of the ceramics of this period will perhaps suggest a solution regarding this problem.

The second Egyptian vessel was found in the 2002 season and contained a child burial[23] that was numbered 24. Within the vessel some Levantine Painted Ware vessels were discovered. Burial 24 also situated in the sand layer above the Early Bronze Age remains and thus belongs to the second phase of Middle Bronze Age levels at Sidon, also corresponding to MBIIA[24] (see p. 56). In contrast to the vessel from burial 13 there are more parallels for this jar, which is considered to be a large storage or water jar and well known in Egypt. In the jargon of the ceramicists working in Egypt they are frequently called *zeîr* according to the Arabic word for water jar.

The Marl C storage jar is wide mouthed, has a wide bag-shaped body and a wide flat base. The overall height measures 66 cm, the rim diameter is ca. 25 cm, the base diameter is about 33 cm and maximum width about 60 cm. The maximum width sits a little lower than the middle of the vessel. Usually such jars are handmade in several parts with very obvious finger striation marks on the inside of the pot with the base formed in a mould. Irregular smoothing marks are very often visible on the outside. The rims are always turned on a turntable and pot marks before or after firing occur frequently[25].

4 Egyptian storage jar S/3024 from Sidon, scale 1:10.





This jar type used for a variety of purposes[26] follows a distinct development in the Middle Kingdom and the Second Intermediate Period to the early New Kingdom in Egypt that allows a rough chronology to be applied on similar finds. A certain disadvantage is the relatively long period of usage of the single subtypes, which extends in our case over several reigns of kings. The partly parallel existence of different subtypes poses another problem. The overall development can be sketched as follows. Firstly this vessel type is represented by a rather bag-shaped vessel with the maximum diameter in the lower third, a wide flat

23 While burials of infants in amphorae occur regularly at Tell el-Dabᶜa, cf. M. Bietak 1991 a, *passim*, the very unusual case of an Egyptian storage jar used as burial urn is only once paralleled there, cf. I. Forstner-Müller 2002, 193, fig., 269.

24 C. Doumet-Serhal, personal communication.

25 Cf. B. Bader 2001, 155 – 189. B. Bader 2002, 35 – 36, 43. For technique see A. Seiler 1999, 216 – 217. For pot marks see Gallorini 1998, *passim*. B. Bader 2001, 205 – 212.

26 B. Bader 2001, 155 – 156.

base and a wide, open mouth. The next step is a decreasing rim diameter, which in its turn is followed by a decrease of base width until bases completely disappear and a round-based vessel emerges. At the same time the maximum diameter moves towards the middle of the vessel, so that the overall shape eventually looks globular. Later the maximum diameter shifts again towards the lower third of the vessel and gives this type a bag-shaped appearance, but with a round base. This last stage of development continues even into the New Kingdom[27].



5 Storage jar from south-wall deposit, after Arnold, 1988, fig 59.3, scale 1:10.

The jar from Sidon seems to be linked to the first two subtypes of storage jars that cover most of the 12th Dynasty[28]. Its maximum diameter lies a little higher than the earliest Egyptian vessels from dated contexts. A word of caution seems appropriate here as even amongst these rather narrowly defined subtypes a considerable variety could be noted in certain shape details of complete vessels (see below). With more complete examples of such vessels from secure contexts published and studied in detail a finer division within the 12th Dynasty might be possible[29].

From the beginning of the 12th Dynasty vessels of the earliest subtype occur in Egypt. In the settlement of the early 12th Dynasty at Tell el-Dabᶜa F/I – stratum relative "e" rim sherds ascribed to this type were unearthed[30]. Further south at Lisht (see fig. 3) in the pyramid complex of Sesostris I complete storage vessels were found (fig. 6). They are dated to the later reign of Sesostris I[31]. Here it becomes clear that there exists a degree of variability within this type especially because of the four vessels situated together in the "south-wall deposit". While the overall shape and the proportion are more or less the same, the sizes are different as well as the rim shape in detail[32]. The same phenomenon can be observed for storage jars from the tomb of the vizier's wife Sit-Werut at Dahshur dateable to early in the reign of Amenemhet III[33]. At the current state of knowledge we cannot say much about certain size classes of storage jars only that they must have existed [34].

More vessels of the first subtype are known from Tell el-Dabᶜa, the area of ᶜEzbet Rushdi, which date to the earlier part of the 12th Dynasty, [35] whereas comparable rim sherds to the rim of the storage jar of Sidon occur as late as the early to mid 13th Dynasty at Tell el-Dabᶜa[36]. The second subtype (fig. 7) is represented by type 67 e from the cemetery of Harageh [37] and Riqqeh[38]. It shows a smaller rim diameter than base diameter, but with

27 Cf. M. Bietak 1991 b, fig. 9. Modified in B. Bader 2001, fig. 43. It is noteworthy that even in the mid-18th Dynasty descendants of the last subtype in other fabrics with a white slip but in the same manufacturing technique of being handmade with turned rim do exist. Cf. A. and A. Brack 1977, pl. 63, 1/43. Tuthmosis IV.

28 It may be that the evaluation of the material in ᶜEzbet Rushdi leads to yet another subtype as precursor of the current subtype 1, that looks similar to the cylindrical vessel B. Bader 2001, fig. 44 a, cat. nr. 262.

29 A hoard of 22 such vessels has been found in the Nubian western desert at Gebel el-Asr, but not published in detail with drawings. Cf. I. Shaw 2003, 451.

30 E. Czerny 1999, Mc 75 – 77, 190.

31 Do. Arnold 1988, 112, fig. 55b; 114, fig. 59, 1-4; 115, fig. 62; 134, fig. 74

32 Do. Arnold 1988, 114, fig. 59.

33 S. Allen, personal communication. Lecture given at the Haindorf Conference, 2000. These storage jars already show a considerably smaller base. D. Arnold 1996, 25.

34 Cf. Do. Arnold 1988, 114.

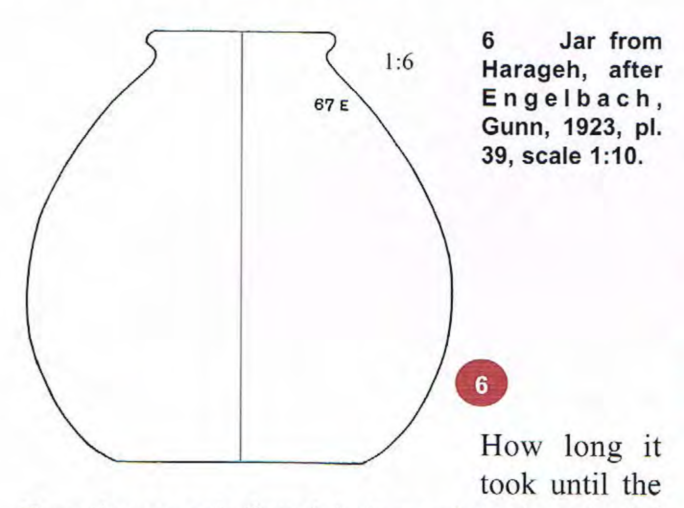
35 B. Bader 2001, 158 – 160, fig. 44 b, c. E. Czerny 2002, fig. 24. Cf. note 14 above.

36 Note that the first subtype can show a variety of different rim types. The Sidon jar rim corresponds best to type 3. Cf. Storage jar rim typology after Bietak and Kopetzky in B. Bader 2001, Abb. 42 b.

37 R. Engelbach, B. Gunn 1923, pl. xxxix.

38 R. Engelbach 1915, pl. xxxii.

the maximum diameter still in the lower third of the vessel. This vessel type is only known complete from old excavations and has been dated rather vaguely from mid 12th Dynasty to 13th Dynasty[39]. The accompanying material is not very explicit, but seems at least more similar to the ceramic repertoire dating to Amenemhet III at Dahshur than to the later material from the 13th Dynasty[40].



6 Jar from Harageh, after Engelbach, Gunn, 1923, pl. 39, scale 1:10.

How long it took until the Egyptian vessels found their way into these burial contexts, what they might have contained and whether they were used at Sidon before they were put into their final res-ting place is impossible to determine. We are left with no other possibility than to assume that these ceramic vessels did not take too much time to travel from Egypt to Sidon. Presumably they were transported by ship and the chances to find more such Egyptian vessels in the Lebanon are ever increasing[41].

39 B. Kemp, R. S. Merrillees 1980, 39 – 56,
40 Do. Arnold 1982, fig. 2 – 10 and fig. 11 – 13.
41 On a field trip to Byblos a sherd of Marl C clay, most probably of a large storage jar, was observed on the surface.
42 K. A. Kitchen 2000, 49.

In conclusion the Egyptian vessels from Sidon suggest a date range in the 12th Dynasty with a possible but unlikely extension towards the earli-er 13th Dynasty. The wide base and narrower rim of the storage jar from burial 24 links this vessel with the earlier half and the middle of the 12th Dynasty, but a date in the reign of Amenemhat III can not be excluded. As parallels from Egypt in this question are not as plentiful as we would wish it seems safer to allow for some leeway until more examples have been found. Absolute dates should be used with care and caution. The low Egyptian absolute chronology currently in use offers ca. 1953 – 1908 BC. for Sesostris I, ca. 1872 – 1853 BC. for Sesostris III and ca. 1853 – 1808 BC. for Amenemhat III [42] as time limits for these vessels. From the above discussion it seems safe to focus on a time after Sesostris I until Amenemhat III.

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